

# ALGORITHMS UNPLUGGED

How Social Platforms Decide What Gets Seen

LINKEDIN • INSTAGRAM • FACEBOOK • YOUTUBE • TIKTOK • REDDIT



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES

Cyber  Gear  
THE INTERNET COMPANY

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A detailed study of LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Reddit - based primarily on first-party platform documentation and engineering disclosures.

## INTRODUCTION

# WHO DECIDES WHAT YOU SEE?

## Every scroll is a decision.

When someone opens LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok or Reddit, they are not simply looking at everything that has been published. They are looking at a selection.

Behind the screen, ranking and recommendation systems continuously decide what should appear, in what order, for which person, at what moment and on which surface.

### THE PREDICTION PROBLEM

What will this person stop for, watch, read, share, discuss or ignore?

### THE PERSONALIZATION PROBLEM

Two people can open the same platform at the same moment and see completely different worlds.

### THE CREATOR PROBLEM

Distribution depends on matching the right content with the right audience - not simply accumulating followers.

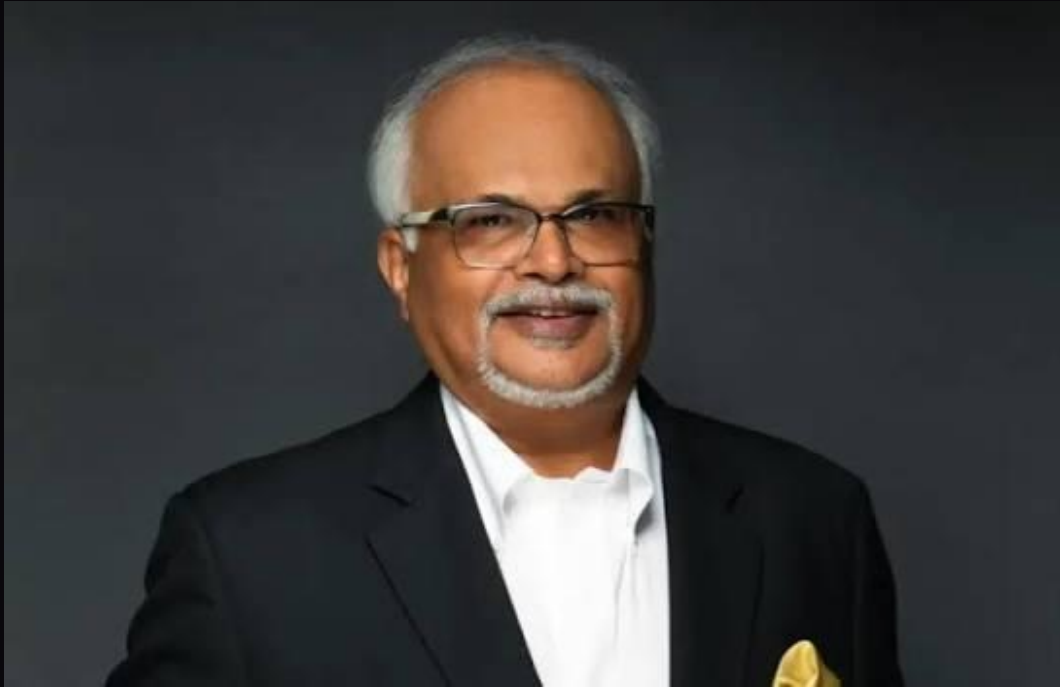
Modern ranking systems increasingly combine behavioral patterns, relationships, content understanding, context and predicted satisfaction. Understanding those systems has become essential for anyone competing for attention online.

**ALGORITHMS DO NOT JUST ORGANIZE CONTENT. THEY ORGANIZE ATTENTION.**

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

# SHARAD AGARWAL

CEO - Cyber Gear



*"Understanding social media algorithms is no longer optional for brands, it is a strategic advantage. The brands that succeed are those that stop chasing algorithms and start creating content that genuinely earns attention, engagement, and trust. When you understand what platforms value, you can turn every post into an opportunity for meaningful growth"*

# WHAT THIS REPORT CAN - AND CANNOT - REVEAL

**There is no public document containing the complete LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok or Reddit algorithm.**

Platforms do not publish source code, complete feature sets, model weights, internal thresholds or every experiment that affects distribution. Those systems also change continuously.

## WHAT PLATFORMS DO DISCLOSE

Ranking surfaces, recommendation architecture, signal families, personalization, eligibility, safety controls, search behavior and creator analytics.

## WHAT WE DO NOT INVENT

Secret percentages, universal thresholds, guaranteed posting times or unsupported claims about “shadow bans.”

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Documented mechanisms are treated as facts. Practical tactics are presented as interpretations of those mechanisms - not magic formulas.

**UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM WELL ENOUGH TO COMPETE  
WITHIN IT.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Primary basis: official Help Centers, engineering blogs, transparency resources and platform product announcements, reviewed through August 2026.

# THERE IS NO SINGLE ALGORITHM

“The algorithm” is useful shorthand. Technically, it is misleading.

|                                                                     |                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>INSTAGRAM</b><br>Feed • Stories • Reels • Explore • Search       | <b>FACEBOOK</b><br>Home/Feed • Reels • Groups • Search • Recommendations     |
| <b>YOUTUBE</b><br>Home • Up Next • Shorts • Search • Subscriptions  | <b>TIKTOK</b><br>For You • Following • Friends • LIVE • Search • Comments    |
| <b>REDDIT</b><br>Home • Popular • Hot • Top • New • Rising • Search | <b>LINKEDIN</b><br>Feed • Suggested Content • Search • Video • Notifications |

A search surface asks which item best matches a query. A discovery feed asks what this person is likely to value next. A following feed starts from an existing relationship. A recommendation surface deliberately reaches beyond that relationship.

KNOW WHICH SURFACE YOU ARE TRYING TO WIN.

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta explicitly describes separate AI systems across Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels, Search and other surfaces; TikTok documents distinct recommender systems by surface; YouTube distinguishes Home, Up Next and Shorts.

# INSIDE A RECOMMENDATION ENGINE

## 01 CANDIDATE GENERATION

Build an initial pool of content that could be relevant.

## 02 FILTERING

Remove spam, blocked, unsafe, already-seen or otherwise ineligible items.

## 03 UNDERSTANDING

Interpret the user, content, creator, relationships and current context.

## 04 PREDICTION

Estimate outcomes such as watch, skip, click, share, comment or satisfaction.

## 05 RANKING

Score and order the remaining candidates.

## 06 RE-RANKING & DIVERSITY

Balance repetition, freshness, content types and exploration.

## 07 FEEDBACK

Use the response to improve future predictions.

**CANDIDATE → FILTER → PREDICT → RANK → DIVERSIFY → LEARN**

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit documents candidate generation, filtering, prediction, ranking and diversity. Meta and LinkedIn disclose comparable multi-stage retrieval and ranking funnels, although implementations differ.

# THE SIGNALS THAT MOVE CONTENT

|                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BEHAVIORAL</b><br>Watch time • completion • skips • clicks • likes • comments • shares • saves • searches • follows | <b>RELATIONSHIP</b><br>Connections • follows • subscriptions • prior interactions • creator affinity • community membership |
| <b>CONTENT</b><br>Topic • text • image • audio • video • format • language • freshness • originality • metadata        | <b>USER</b><br>Interest history • professional context • communities • location • language • device settings                |
| <b>CONTEXT</b><br>Current surface • current video/post • session behavior • time • recent activity                     | <b>NEGATIVE</b><br>Fast skips • dislikes • hides • “Not interested” • reports • blocks • repeated avoidance                 |

No signal works in isolation, and the same signal can carry different importance on different surfaces.

**DO NOT ASK “DO LIKES MATTER?” ASK WHAT THE  
INTERACTION TELLS THE SYSTEM.**

# BEFORE RANKING: ELIGIBILITY & NEGATIVE SIGNALS

Creators often optimize for positive signals. But recommendation usually starts one step earlier: can the content be recommended at all?

## ELIGIBILITY FILTERS

Safety policies • spam controls • sensitive content rules • recommendation standards • duplicate/low-value controls

## EXPLICIT NEGATIVES

Not interested • hide • dislike • report • block • do not recommend

## IMPLICIT NEGATIVES

Fast skip • very short dwell • immediate return • repeated avoidance • low follow-through

A piece of content can be allowed on a platform without being eligible for broad algorithmic recommendation. TikTok can mark posts or entire accounts ineligible for For You recommendations; Meta separates allowed content from recommendation guidelines; Reddit filters spam, blocked and already-seen items before ranking.

**THE FIRST GROWTH HACK: STAY ELIGIBLE TO GROW.**

## PLATFORM MAP

# THE SIX-PLATFORM ALGORITHM MAP

|                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>LINKEDIN</b><br>CORE: professional relevance<br>SIGNALS: identity, interests, network, dwell, engagement<br>GROWTH: useful expertise beyond your immediate network      | <b>INSTAGRAM</b><br>CORE: interest + entertainment<br>SIGNALS: watch behavior, relationships, predicted actions, originality<br>GROWTH: Reels and Explore to non-followers    |
| <b>FACEBOOK</b><br>CORE: connection + discovery<br>SIGNALS: relationships, behavior, video consumption, freshness, originality<br>GROWTH: recommendations beyond followers | <b>YOUTUBE</b><br>CORE: long-term viewer satisfaction<br>SIGNALS: watch/search history, performance, feedback, satisfaction<br>GROWTH: Home, Up Next, Search and Shorts       |
| <b>TIKTOK</b><br>CORE: personalized discovery<br>SIGNALS: watch behavior, full watches/skips, content info, search relevance<br>GROWTH: interest graph over follower graph | <b>REDDIT</b><br>CORE: relevant community conversation<br>SIGNALS: votes, comments, freshness, community, history, feedback<br>GROWTH: machine relevance + community approval |
| <b>SIX PLATFORMS. DIFFERENT SYSTEMS. ONE COMPETITION: ATTENTION.</b>                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                               |

# PROFESSIONAL RELEVANCE MEETS AI RANKING

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Connect each professional with timely, trusted content that supports their work, interests and career journey.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

Profile and professional context • network • topic relevance • activity • dwell • constructive engagement • freshness

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Content that is useful beyond the creator's direct network and clearly grounded in professional context.

**LINKEDIN: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING  
THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Engineering (Mar 2026); LinkedIn Help: How the Feed ranks content; Suggested posts in feed.

# INSIDE LINKEDIN'S **FEED** ARCHITECTURE

LinkedIn has historically described a multi-stage Feed funnel: candidate systems retrieve possible posts, then a more precise ranking layer orders them for each member.

|                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NETWORK CANDIDATES</b><br>Posts from connections, people followed, companies, groups and other network sources.                                               | <b>OUT-OF-NETWORK CANDIDATES</b><br>Suggested professional content that may be useful even when the creator is not already connected to the viewer.              |
| <b>RETRIEVAL</b><br>LinkedIn’s 2026 architecture moves toward a unified LLM-powered retrieval system that creates richer representations of members and content. | <b>RANKING</b><br>A sequential model evaluates candidates in the context of the member’s professional history rather than treating every impression as isolated. |

The system operates at massive scale: LinkedIn says it ranks millions of posts while balancing relevance with freshness.

**RETRIEVAL DECIDES WHAT GETS CONSIDERED. RANKING  
DECIDES WHAT GETS SEEN.**

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Engineering, “Engineering the next generation of LinkedIn’s Feed,” Mar 12, 2026; “Leveraging Dwell Time...,” Oct 2024.

# WHAT LINKEDIN ACTUALLY MEASURES

|                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>IDENTITY SIGNALS</b><br>Location • workplace • position • skills • professional background • network context                       | <b>CONTENT SIGNALS</b><br>Topic • professional relevance • recency • language • creator relationship • tagged people/companies • conversation quality |
| <b>ACTIVITY SIGNALS</b><br>Reactions • comments • reposts • follows • frequent interactions • topics of interest • time spent viewing | <b>FEEDBACK SIGNALS</b><br>Hide • not interested • reports • repeated skips • signals that content is low-quality or unsafe                           |

LinkedIn says Feed ranking uses hundreds of signals. It also states that demographic attributes such as age, race and gender are not used to determine Feed visibility.

THE FEED MODELS PROFESSIONAL RELEVANCE - NOT JUST POPULARITY.

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Help: “How the Feed ranks content” and “LinkedIn relevance - Optimizing the member experience,” updated 2025-2026.

# DWELL TIME: THE ENGAGEMENT YOU CANNOT SEE

A member can find a post valuable without liking, commenting or reposting it. LinkedIn therefore treats passive consumption as meaningful information.

|                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SHORT DWELL</b><br>Very brief viewing can indicate that a post was effectively skipped. LinkedIn has used predicted short dwell as a negative ranking signal. | <b>LONG DWELL</b><br>Sustained reading or watching provides a positive preference signal, especially for passive consumers and out-of-network content. |
| <b>WHY IT MATTERS</b><br>Dwell is abundant, continuous and available even when explicit engagement is sparse.                                                    | <b>WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN</b><br>LinkedIn explicitly warns against blindly maximizing time spent. The objective is “time well spent,” not dwell bait.   |
| <b>A QUIET READER CAN STILL SEND A STRONG RANKING SIGNAL.</b>                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                        |

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Engineering, “Leveraging Dwell Time to Improve Member Experiences on the LinkedIn Feed,” Oct 1, 2024; earlier dwell research, May 2020.

# LINKEDIN'S 2026 GENERATIVE RECOMMENDER

In March 2026, LinkedIn disclosed a major Feed redesign built around LLMs, GPUs and a Generative Recommender (GR).

|                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>1,000+</div> <div>HISTORICAL INTERACTIONS</div> <div>GR processes more than a thousand prior interactions as a sequence.</div> | <div>1.3B+</div> <div>PROFESSIONALS</div> <div>The Feed serves a global professional graph at massive scale.</div> | <div>Relevance + freshness</div> <div>RANKING OBJECTIVE</div> <div>The system balances evolving interests with timely professional content.</div> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Instead of scoring each impression independently, GR treats Feed history as a professional story: what members read, like, comment on, return to and scroll past, combined with profile signals and changing interests over time.

The implication for creators is significant: topic consistency and useful professional context can help the system understand where a creator belongs, while repeated generic content may provide weaker semantic differentiation.

THE FEED IS LEARNING YOUR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY - NOT JUST YOUR LAST CLICK.

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Engineering, Mar 12, 2026. "More than a thousand" historical interactions is LinkedIn's disclosed GR design, not a creator benchmark.

# SEARCH, SUGGESTED CONTENT & WHAT GETS SUPPRESSED

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>SUGGESTED POSTS</b></p> <p>For out-of-network distribution, LinkedIn prioritizes high-quality professional content that provides enough context to be useful to people who do not already know the creator.</p>  | <p><b>SEARCH</b></p> <p>Search is personalized by category. LinkedIn says People results can use profile, activity, connections, search activity and engagement with similar results; Pages consider query relevance, activity and prominence.</p> |
| <p><b>REDUCED DISTRIBUTION</b></p> <p>Low-quality or unsafe content can be filtered or tapered. Promotional/off-topic posts, engagement bait, unoriginal posts and engagement pods may not be recommended broadly.</p> | <p><b>2026 ANTI-MANIPULATION PUSH</b></p> <p>LinkedIn says it is working to make engagement pods ineffective, curb automated comments, and reduce generic or click-driven content.</p>                                                             |
| <p><b>BROADER REACH REQUIRES BROADER PROFESSIONAL VALUE.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

**SOURCE NOTE** LinkedIn Help: Suggested posts; LinkedIn Content Recommendations: What to Avoid; LinkedIn Corporate Communications, Mar 12, 2026.

# LINKEDIN ALGORITHM PLAYBOOK

- 01 Own a clear professional territory. Repeated expertise helps both people and models understand what you are about.
- 02 Lead with insight, not bait. Explain what happened, why it matters and what professionals should do next.
- 03 Optimize for useful dwell: strong opening, clean formatting, documents, charts and ideas worth reading.
- 04 Write for people outside your network. Give enough context that a stranger can understand the value immediately.
- 05 Invite real conversation. Ask for perspective when the answer is genuinely interesting - not because you need comments.
- 06 Keep profile and content aligned. Your professional identity is part of LinkedIn's relevance model.
- 07 Avoid pods, automated comments, generic reposting and "comment YES" tactics.

## METRICS TO WATCH

Impressions • members reached • reactions • comments  
• reposts • saves • sends • link visits

## USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Compare posts that generate saves/sends or long-form reading against posts that only generate reactions.

**BE USEFUL BEFORE TRYING TO BE VIRAL.**

# ATTENTION, SHARING & ORIGINALITY

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Match people with visual content they are likely to enjoy, interact with and share - across several independently ranked surfaces.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

Viewing behavior • predicted interaction • relationships • content understanding • sharing • originality • feedback

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Unconnected recommendations through Reels and Explore, plus testing through Trial Reels.

**INSTAGRAM: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Engineering: Instagram 1000+ models; Meta AI unconnected recommendations; Meta 2026 AI performance update.

# INSTAGRAM HAS MULTIPLE ALGORITHMS

Instagram explicitly rejects the idea of one universal algorithm. Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels, Search, notifications and other experiences use different ranking systems.

|                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FEED</b><br>Blend content from accounts you follow with recommendations; predict what you are likely to value and engage with. | <b>STORIES</b><br>Prioritize relationship and predicted interest in updates from accounts you follow.                     |
| <b>REELS</b><br>Discovery-heavy vertical video ranking with strong dependence on viewing behavior and content understanding.      | <b>EXPLORE</b><br>Find relevant unconnected posts through retrieval and multi-stage ranking.                              |
| <b>SEARCH</b><br>Use the query as a strong expression of intent and organize results around relevance.                            | <b>BEHIND THE SCENES</b><br>Meta reported more than 1,000 ML models across Instagram surfaces and ranking layers by 2025. |

**DIFFERENT SURFACE. DIFFERENT PREDICTION PROBLEM.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Engineering, “Journey to 1000 models,” May 2025; Meta System Cards; Instagram Ranking Explained (2023, still referenced by Meta’s transparency ecosystem).

# FEED & STORIES: **RELATIONSHIP** STILL MATTERS

|                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FEED CONTEXT</b><br>Feed combines followed content with recommended posts. Ranking considers what someone has interacted with, the post, the creator and the relationship between viewer and creator. | <b>STORIES CONTEXT</b><br>Stories are fundamentally relationship-driven because the candidate pool is usually accounts the person already follows.                                            |
| <b>BEHAVIORAL HISTORY</b><br>Past viewing, liking, replying, sharing and other interaction patterns help estimate whether a person will care about the next item.                                        | <b>USER CONTROLS</b><br>Following and Favorites feeds give users alternative ways to shape what they see; recommendation reset can rebuild suggested content over time from new interactions. |

For creators, connected reach is therefore not purely a follower-count game. The quality and recency of the relationship between an account and its audience matter.

**FOLLOWERS CREATE THE POOL. RELATIONSHIPS SHAPE THE ORDER.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta/Instagram ranking documentation; Meta Recommendations Reset, Nov 2024; Meta System Cards for Instagram Feed and Stories.

# THE REELS ALGORITHM

Reels is one of Instagram’s strongest discovery surfaces because it can place content in front of people who do not follow the creator.

|                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>VIEWER RESPONSE</b><br>Did people stop, continue watching, replay, like, share or move on quickly?                                                            | <b>CONTENT UNDERSTANDING</b><br>Meta models can interpret image, text, audio and video to classify topics and match content with interests.                       |
| <b>UNCONNECTED DISCOVERY</b><br>Recommendation systems retrieve from content outside a person’s network, narrow the pool and rank the most promising candidates. | <b>FEEDBACK LOOP</b><br>Watching to completion or sharing reinforces interest; fast abandonment, hiding and “Not interested” help reduce similar recommendations. |

Meta’s recommendation stack is built to mix popular and niche content and to help high-quality new content find an audience even when engagement history is limited.

**REELS REWARDS THE MATCH BETWEEN CONTENT AND VIEWER - NOT SIMPLY ACCOUNT SIZE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta AI, “The AI behind unconnected content recommendations on Facebook and Instagram,” Jun 2023; Meta Engineering, May 2025.

# EXPLORE: DISCOVERY THROUGH MULTI-STAGE RANKING

Explore is designed for discovery. The challenge is to select a tiny set of relevant posts from a massive universe of unfamiliar content.

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SOURCING / RETRIEVAL</b><br>Find a large candidate set connected to the viewer’s inferred interests. | <b>EARLY-STAGE RANKING</b><br>Use relatively efficient models to reduce the pool.                                                      |
| <b>LATE-STAGE RANKING</b><br>Run heavier models on fewer candidates to refine predicted relevance.      | <b>DIVERSITY &amp; BALANCE</b><br>Avoid a feed that is too repetitive and mix adjacent interests, popular content and niche discovery. |

Meta’s infrastructure description confirms that Instagram ranking funnels use sourcing, early-stage ranking and late-stage ranking. Fewer candidates remain as computation becomes more expensive.

**EXPLORE IS NOT A POPULARITY CHART. IT IS PERSONALIZED DISCOVERY.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Engineering, “Journey to 1000 models,” 2025; “Scaling the Instagram Explore recommendations system,” 2023.

# INSTAGRAM SEARCH

Search differs from Feed or Reels because the user supplies an explicit query. That query becomes the clearest expression of immediate intent.

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>QUERY RELEVANCE</b><br>Names, usernames, bios, captions, topics and other indexed context help Instagram interpret what the user is looking for. | <b>USER ACTIVITY</b><br>Previous interactions and accounts/topics the person already engages with can personalize the ordering.                                              |
| <b>POPULARITY/CONTEXT</b><br>Broader signals around accounts or posts can help distinguish among multiple relevant results.                         | <b>CREATOR IMPLICATION</b><br>Use clear language. If a human cannot quickly tell what the post or profile is about, semantic retrieval has less useful context to work with. |

Search optimization should therefore begin with descriptive naming and useful topic context, not with stuffing captions with unrelated keywords.

**SEARCH IS WHERE SEMANTIC CLARITY BECOMES DISTRIBUTION.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Instagram’s official Search explainer (Adam Mosseri, Aug 2021) and Meta’s later content-understanding disclosures. Exact weights are not published.

# CONNECTED VS UNCONNECTED REACH

|                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>CONNECTED REACH</b></p> <p>Followers and existing relationships provide a known audience. The system has richer history about likely interest.</p> | <p><b>UNCONNECTED REACH</b></p> <p>Reels, Explore and Feed recommendations must decide whether content is valuable to people with no direct relationship to the creator.</p> |
| <p><b>WHY SHARES MATTER</b></p> <p>A send or share is a strong human signal that the content may have value beyond the current viewer.</p>               | <p><b>WHY CONTEXT MATTERS</b></p> <p>Unconnected viewers do not know the creator. The post must make sense without requiring prior familiarity.</p>                          |

Trial Reels makes this distinction tangible: creators can deliberately test a Reel with non-followers first and review views, likes, comments and shares before deciding whether to push it to followers.

**GROWTH HAPPENS WHEN CONTENT SURVIVES OUTSIDE ITS RELATIONSHIP BUBBLE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta, “Test Content With Non-Followers Using Trial Reels,” Dec 2024; updated Jun 2025.

# ORIGINALITY, ELIGIBILITY & COLD START

|                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>75%</b></p> <p><b>US INSTAGRAM<br/>RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p>Meta said 75% of recommendations in the US came from original posts by Q4 2025.</p> | <p><b>Billions →<br/>thousands →<br/>hundreds</b></p> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION FUNNEL</b></p> <p>Meta narrows enormous candidate pools before final ranking.</p> | <p><b>Few-shot + online<br/>learning</b></p> <p><b>COLD START</b></p> <p>Meta describes systems designed to match new people and new content even when history is sparse.</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Originality is increasingly structural, not cosmetic. Meta is investing in systems that recognize what content is about, reduce problematic or low-value material, and give high-quality new content a chance to find relevant audiences.

Eligibility also matters: content can remain on Instagram while being excluded from recommendation surfaces if it does not meet recommendation standards.

**ORIGINAL CONTENT GIVES THE SYSTEM SOMETHING NEW TO DISTRIBUTE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta 2026 AI performance update; Meta AI unconnected recommendation architecture; Instagram recommendation controls and eligibility guidance.

# INSTAGRAM ALGORITHM PLAYBOOK

- 01 Win the first moment. Reels must earn the decision not to scroll.
- 02 Design for sustained viewing, not just a strong first frame. Use retention charts to find where attention collapses.
- 03 Create send-worthy ideas: useful, surprising, specific or emotionally resonant content naturally moves through DMs.
- 04 Create original work or add meaningful transformation. Meta is explicitly increasing original recommendations.
- 05 Write for non-followers. Give unfamiliar viewers enough context to understand the value instantly.
- 06 Use Trial Reels to test new ideas with non-followers before pushing them to the core audience.
- 07 Use clear topic language for Search and content understanding; avoid irrelevant keyword or hashtag stuffing.

## METRICS TO WATCH

Watch time • retention • views • shares • comments • likes • non-follower reach

## USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Compare three hooks on the same topic, then compare share rate and retention rather than raw views alone.

**DO NOT ASK WHAT INSTAGRAM WANTS. ASK WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO KEEP AND SEND.**

# FROM SOCIAL GRAPH TO DISCOVERY ENGINE

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Blend posts from relationships with increasingly powerful AI recommendations that help people discover creators, communities and videos outside their direct network.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

Relationship history • predicted engagement • video behavior • content understanding • freshness • originality • negative feedback

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Public Reels and recommended Feed content can reach people who do not already follow the creator.

**FACEBOOK: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING  
THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Feed ranking explainers; Meta 2025-2026 Reels, spam and originality updates.

# HOW FACEBOOK FEED RANKING WORKS

Facebook has described Feed ranking as a layered machine-learning process rather than a single score.

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. INVENTORY</b><br>Gather eligible posts from friends, Pages, Groups and recommended sources.                                                   | <b>2. SIGNALS</b><br>Evaluate information about the post, creator, relationship, format, freshness and prior behavior.                                                        |
| <b>3. PREDICTIONS</b><br>Estimate how likely a person is to find the post valuable or take actions such as watching, liking, commenting or sharing. | <b>4. RANKING &amp; CONTEXT</b><br>Combine predictions into a score, narrow the candidate pool, then apply additional rules such as content diversity and integrity controls. |

Meta has described more than a thousand candidate posts per person in historical Feed architecture, with ranking layers progressively narrowing the pool before final ordering.

**FACEBOOK RANKS A POST FOR SOMEONE - NOT FOR EVERYONE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Newsroom: “How Does News Feed Predict What You Want to See?” 2021; system cards and newer AI recommendation disclosures.

# WHAT FACEBOOK PREDICTS ABOUT YOU

|                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>RELATIONSHIP</b><br>How often and how recently you interact with a person, Page or Group.                                                    | <b>FORMAT PREFERENCE</b><br>Whether you tend to engage with video, photos, links, text or particular content types.                           |
| <b>EXPECTED ACTIONS</b><br>Likelihood of watch, click, comment, share, reaction or other outcomes.                                              | <b>MEANINGFULNESS</b><br>Meta has historically incorporated survey-based measures of whether people actually wanted to see or valued a story. |
| <b>FRESHNESS</b><br>Recent content can be favored when it matches current interest; Meta increased same-day Reels recommendations in 2025-2026. | <b>NEGATIVE FEEDBACK</b><br>Hide, Show Less, quick abandonment and other dissatisfaction signals help correct future recommendations.         |
| <b>PREDICTION IS PERSONAL. ENGAGEMENT IS EVIDENCE, NOT THE OBJECTIVE BY ITSELF.</b>                                                             |                                                                                                                                               |

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta Feed ranking explainers; Meta AI unconnected recommendations; Meta 2026 AI performance update.

# FACEBOOK'S NEW VIDEO REALITY

|                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>All videos → Reels</b></p> <p><b>NEW VIDEO PUBLISHING</b></p> <p>Meta announced that newly posted Facebook videos would be shared as Reels as the publishing experiences unify.</p> | <p><b>+25% same-day Reels</b></p> <p><b>FRESH CONTENT</b></p> <p>Meta reported more same-day Reels surfaced versus Q3 2025.</p> | <p><b>Double-digit YoY growth</b></p> <p><b>VIDEO TIME SPENT</b></p> <p>Meta reported double-digit US video time-spent growth in Q4 2025.</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The practical implication is not that every Facebook video must be short. Meta says Reels can include video of different lengths and formats. What changes is the publishing and discovery layer: video increasingly enters a unified Reels ecosystem personalized around viewer interests.

**ON FACEBOOK, “VIDEO STRATEGY” INCREASINGLY MEANS “REELS DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY.”**

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta, “Making it Easier to Create Videos on Facebook,” Jun 2025; “2026: AI Drives Performance,” Jan 2026.

# CONNECTED + UNCONNECTED DISCOVERY

Facebook now operates as a hybrid between the social graph people built intentionally and an interest graph inferred by AI.

|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CONNECTED</b><br>Friends • followed Pages • Groups • existing relationships<br>• direct social activity                     | <b>UNCONNECTED</b><br>Recommended creators • public Reels • suggested posts • adjacent interests • content outside the existing graph                  |
| <b>CONTENT UNDERSTANDING</b><br>Meta models interpret text, image, audio and video to identify topics and semantic similarity. | <b>PREFERENCE UNDERSTANDING</b><br>Large-scale attention and graph models learn how interests evolve and which adjacent topics may be worth exploring. |

Meta describes retrieval systems that narrow tens of billions of possible unconnected items to thousands, then hundreds, before final ranking.

THE FOLLOWER GRAPH OPENS THE DOOR. THE INTEREST GRAPH EXPANDS THE ROOM.

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta AI, “The AI behind unconnected content recommendations on Facebook and Instagram,” Jun 2023.

# ORIGINALITY, FRESHNESS & SPAM

|                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>ORIGINAL CONTENT</b></p> <p>Facebook says it is prioritizing original creators across Feed and Reels while reducing low-value copycat content.</p>            | <p><b>FRESHNESS</b></p> <p>Meta has increased the proportion of Reels recommended on the same day they were posted.</p>                                       |
| <p><b>CAPTION ABUSE</b></p> <p>Accounts using long distracting captions, excessive hashtags or captions unrelated to the content can lose recommendation reach.</p> | <p><b>SPAM NETWORKS</b></p> <p>Networks of accounts pushing the same spammy material can see reduced reach and monetization eligibility.</p>                  |
| <p><b>FAKE ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Distribution-gaming behavior is increasingly treated as a quality problem, not a growth strategy.</p>                              | <p><b>USEFUL TRANSFORMATION</b></p> <p>Commentary, analysis or meaningful creative transformation is different from simply reposting someone else’s work.</p> |
| <p><b>THE SHORTCUT IS BECOMING THE PENALTY.</b></p>                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                               |

**SOURCE NOTE** Meta, “Cracking Down on Spammy Content on Facebook,” Apr 2025; “Rewarding Original Creators on Facebook,” Mar 2026.

# FACEBOOK ALGORITHM

## PLAYBOOK

- 01 Create original material. Facebook is explicitly expanding distribution for original content.
- 02 Publish video with Reels discovery in mind, regardless of length. Use public audience settings when reach is the goal.
- 03 Match captions to the actual content. Unrelated text and hashtag stuffing can restrict recommendation.
- 04 Build genuine conversation; do not manufacture comments or use spam networks.
- 05 Publish timely material when the topic benefits from freshness - Meta is surfacing more same-day Reels.
- 06 Use viewer feedback as product research. Hide/Show Less behavior is telling the system when you missed the audience.
- 07 Watch retention and repeat performance across topics rather than treating one viral post as a permanent account unlock.

### METRICS TO WATCH

Reach • 3-sec/video views • watch time • retention • reactions • comments • shares • follower vs non-follower distribution

### USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Repurpose one strong topic into a short Reel and a longer explanatory Reel; compare watch time and completion by audience source.

**ORIGINAL + RELEVANT + TIMELY BEATS SPAMMY GROWTH HACKS.**

# THE SATISFACTION ALGORITHM

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Help each viewer find videos they are likely to watch and enjoy, so they keep returning to YouTube over the long term.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

Watch/search history • performance • clicks • retention • likes/dislikes • explicit feedback • satisfaction surveys

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Match the right video to the right viewer across Home, Up Next, Search and Shorts.

**YOUTUBE: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Help: How recommendations work; Search & discovery tips; Performance FAQ; Search ranking.

# YOUTUBE IS SEVERAL ALGORITHMS

|                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>HOME</b><br>Primarily personalized. Watch history is a major signal; performance with similar viewers also matters. | <b>UP NEXT</b><br>The current video is a major context signal, combined with personalization and viewing history.                                  |
| <b>SEARCH</b><br>Explicit query intent. Rank by relevance, engagement for that query and quality.                      | <b>SHORTS</b><br>A personalized short-form feed using viewed vs. swiped away, viewing duration, percentage viewed, satisfaction and topic history. |
| <b>SUBSCRIPTIONS</b><br>Recent uploads from subscribed channels provide a relationship-based surface.                  | <b>OTHER SURFACES</b><br>Destination pages and channel shelves can also contain personalized recommendations.                                      |
| <b>THERE IS NO SINGLE “YOUTUBE ALGORITHM” TO OPTIMIZE.</b>                                                             |                                                                                                                                                    |

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Help, “How YouTube recommendations work,” current 2026 guidance.

# APPEAL → ENGAGEMENT → SATISFACTION

| APPEAL                                                                                                  | ENGAGEMENT                                                                                                               | SATISFACTION                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Did the viewer choose to watch?<br>Packaging - topic, title and thumbnail - earns the initial decision. | Did the viewer stay?<br>Average view duration and average percentage viewed help indicate whether the content delivered. | Was watching worthwhile?<br>Likes, dislikes, explicit negative feedback and post-watch surveys help estimate value beyond raw time. |

YouTube's own creator guidance repeatedly emphasizes that the system follows viewer behavior. A high click-through rate is not enough if viewers quickly leave; long watch time is not enough if satisfaction is poor.

**THE REAL FUNNEL: CLICK → STAY → ENJOY.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Search & Discovery Tips; How YouTube recommendations work; YouTube Analytics documentation.

# HOME + UP NEXT

## HOME

YouTube primarily uses watch history to personalize Home. It also considers how videos perform with similar viewers and how often the viewer watches a channel or topic.

## UP NEXT

The video currently being watched is a major input. Suggested videos are often related to that video, but personalization through watch history also matters.

## VIEWING PATHS

Videos that are naturally watched together create useful recommendation relationships. Series, topic clusters and clear next steps can help viewers continue.

## NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

“Not interested” and “Don’t recommend channel” explicitly teach YouTube what to avoid in future recommendations.

A creator should therefore think beyond the individual upload: what audience is this video for, and what should that audience reasonably want next?

**BUILD VIDEOS. THEN BUILD THE PATH BETWEEN THEM.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Help, “How YouTube recommendations work” and Performance FAQ.

# YOUTUBE SEARCH

|                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Relevance</b><br><b>RANKING PILLAR</b><br>How well title, tags, description and video content match the query. | <b>Engagement</b><br><b>RANKING PILLAR</b><br>How users engage with a video for that particular search, including watch time. | <b>Quality</b><br><b>RANKING PILLAR</b><br>Signals of expertise, authoritativeness and trustworthiness for the topic. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Search results are not simply the most-viewed videos. YouTube tries to answer the query well, then uses engagement and quality signals to distinguish among relevant candidates.

For creators, this means search optimization is not just metadata. The actual video has to satisfy the query after the click.

**KEYWORD MATCH EARNS CONSIDERATION. SEARCH SATISFACTION EARNS POSITION.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Help, “How YouTube search works,” 2026; Search & Discovery Tips.

# THE SHORTS ALGORITHM

|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CHOOSE TO VIEW</b><br>YouTube measures the percentage of viewers who viewed a Short rather than swiping away.        | <b>AVERAGE VIEW DURATION</b><br>How long engaged viewers watched.                                                                |
| <b>AVERAGE PERCENTAGE VIEWED</b><br>How much of the Short engaged viewers consumed.                                     | <b>ENJOYMENT</b><br>Likes and post-watch survey responses provide satisfaction signals.                                          |
| <b>PERSONALIZATION</b><br>Watch/search history, topics, channels and trends a viewer has enjoyed shape recommendations. | <b>EXTERNAL FACTORS</b><br>Topic interest, competition and seasonality can change reach even when a Short’s metrics look strong. |

Since March 2025, YouTube counts a Short “view” when playback starts or replays, while “Engaged views” remains available in Analytics to show viewers who chose to continue watching.

**FOR SHORTS, THE FIRST ALGORITHMIC DECISION IS SIMPLE: WATCH OR SWIPE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Search & Discovery Tips - Shorts; YouTube Analytics; Shorts views-count update effective Mar 31, 2025.

# WHAT CHANGES DISTRIBUTION

|                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>TOPIC INTEREST</b></p> <p>Some topics have a much larger potential audience than others, and interest changes over time.</p>                 | <p><b>COMPETITION</b></p> <p>Your video competes with every other video a viewer might watch. Good metrics can still lose to stronger alternatives.</p>              |
| <p><b>SEASONALITY</b></p> <p>Viewer habits shift around holidays, events, school calendars and regional patterns.</p>                              | <p><b>AUDIENCE EVOLUTION</b></p> <p>People’s interests change. A channel can lose Home traffic because viewers are simply watching other topics or creators.</p>     |
| <p><b>RETURNING VIEWERS</b></p> <p>A viral video can create temporary reach without creating a durable audience if those viewers never return.</p> | <p><b>OLD-CONTENT REVIVAL</b></p> <p>Older videos can suddenly rise when a topic becomes more relevant, a series renews interest or new viewers binge a channel.</p> |

**REACH IS A MARKET OUTCOME, NOT A FIXED REWARD FOR A GOOD METRIC.**

**SOURCE NOTE** YouTube Search & Discovery Tips and YouTube Performance FAQ.

# YOUTUBE MYTHS

**MYTH: THE ALGORITHM PREFERS A SPECIFIC VIDEO FORMAT.**

YouTube says it has no opinion about the type of video; ranking is based on performance and viewer personalization.

**MYTH: YOU MUST UPLOAD EVERY DAY.**

For Shorts, YouTube explicitly says there is no minimum posting cadence required for performance.

**MYTH: SEARCH IS JUST KEYWORD STUFFING.**

Search considers query match, engagement and quality - including actual video content.

**MYTH: THERE IS ONE IDEAL VIDEO LENGTH.**

There is no universal ideal. The right length is the length needed to satisfy the viewer without padding.

**MYTH: ONE WEAK SHORT DAMAGES LONG-FORM RECOMMENDATIONS.**

YouTube says Shorts performance does not negatively impact long-form recommendations.

**MYTH: THE SYSTEM PROMOTES CHANNELS.**

YouTube's own phrasing is that it finds videos for an audience when they visit the platform.

**DO NOT OPTIMIZE AROUND MYTHS YOUTUBE ITSELF REJECTS.**

## 04 - YOUTUBE

# YOUTUBE ALGORITHM PLAYBOOK

- 01** Win the click accurately. Strong titles and thumbnails create appeal; misleading packaging creates disappointment.
- 02** Deliver on the promise immediately. Early drop-off often means the packaging promised a different experience.
- 03** Study retention by moment, not only average watch time. Identify where viewers leave.
- 04** Build connected viewing paths: series, topic clusters, playlists and natural “watch next” ideas.
- 05** For Shorts, track Stayed to watch, average view duration and average percentage viewed — not raw views alone.
- 06** For Search, satisfy the query in the video itself and use descriptive metadata.
- 07** Compare performance against topic interest and competition before assuming an algorithm penalty.

### METRICS TO WATCH

Impressions • CTR • watch time • average view duration • average % viewed • stayed to watch • returning viewers

### USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Run packaging tests on similar topics. Improve title/thumbnail without changing the core promise, then compare retention after the click.

**OPTIMIZE FOR WATCHING THAT FEELS WORTHWHILE.**

# THE DISCOVERY MACHINE

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Predict which content each person will find interesting across For You, Following, Friends, LIVE, Search, Comments and other recommendation surfaces.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

User interactions • watch time • full watches/skips • content information • search relevance • language/location • similar-user behavior

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Interest-based discovery allows individual posts to travel well beyond the creator's follower base.

**TIKTOK: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help: How TikTok recommends content; recommendation eligibility and account eligibility guidance.

# TIKTOK IS MORE THAN FOR YOU

|                                                                                                              |                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FOR YOU</b><br>Personalized discovery from a large collection of eligible content.                        | <b>FOLLOWING</b><br>Content from followed creators, ranked uniquely for each person.                   |
| <b>FRIENDS</b><br>Content from mutual connections, followed accounts and suggested people.                   | <b>LIVE</b><br>Live-stream recommendations using viewing, interaction, creator and contextual signals. |
| <b>SEARCH</b><br>Query-led ranking where content relevance to the search term generally carries more weight. | <b>COMMENTS</b><br>Comment ranking based on user interactions, likes, language and other context.      |

TikTok explicitly says signal importance changes by recommender system. That is why advice that is valid for For You can be wrong for Search or Comments.

**THE SURFACE CHANGES THE WEIGHT OF THE SIGNAL.**

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help, “How TikTok recommends content,” current 2026 documentation.

# INSIDE THE **FOR YOU** ALGORITHM

|                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>USER INTERACTIONS</b><br>Likes • shares • comments • full watches • skips • reciprocal follows • watch time | <b>CONTENT INFORMATION</b><br>Sounds • hashtags • view count • publishing country • topic/context signals                                        |
| <b>USER INFORMATION</b><br>Device settings • language • location • time zone/day • device type                 | <b>SIMILAR-INTEREST BEHAVIOR</b><br>Some recommenders use interactions of people with similar interests to predict what another person may like. |

TikTok states that for most users, interaction signals - including time spent watching - are generally weighted more heavily in For You than content or device information.

At sign-up, TikTok can begin with selected interests or recent popular content influenced by location and language, then rapidly personalize as interactions accumulate.

**FOR YOU LEARNS FROM WHAT YOU WATCH - AND WHAT YOU SKIP.**

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help, “How TikTok recommends content.”

# FOLLOWING, FRIENDS & LIVE

## FOLLOWING

Visits to followed profiles, likes, shares, comments, full watches and skips help rank content from creators the person already follows.

## FRIENDS

Interaction with friends or people you may know matters; TikTok notes that video likes/comments can be comparatively important in this surface.

## LIVE

Watch time, likes, comments, followed creators and Gifts can influence LIVE recommendations; content-level popularity and creator signals also contribute.

## WHY IT MATTERS

The same creator can rank differently for the same viewer across For You, Following, Friends and LIVE because each surface serves a different job.

**EXISTING RELATIONSHIP CHANGES THE RECOMMENDATION PROBLEM.**

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help: surface-specific recommendation factors for Following, Friends and LIVE.

# TIKTOK SEARCH & COMMENT RANKING

|                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>SEARCH: QUERY MATCH</b></p> <p>TikTok says content information - especially how well the content matches the entered term - is generally weighted more heavily than other factors for most users.</p> | <p><b>SEARCH: BEHAVIOR</b></p> <p>Past searches and content that a person liked, shared, commented on, watched fully or skipped still contribute.</p>                        |
| <p><b>COMMENTS: CONTENT INFO</b></p> <p>Comment language and number of likes can be influential.</p>                                                                                                        | <p><b>COMMENTS: RELATIONSHIP</b></p> <p>Comments the viewer has liked/replied to and whether they follow the post creator or comment author can affect what is surfaced.</p> |

For creators, TikTok SEO is therefore not just hashtags. Speech, on-screen text, captions and clear semantic context all help people and systems understand what the content is actually about.

**FOR SEARCH, RELEVANCE TO THE QUERY CAN OUTWEIGH GENERIC ENGAGEMENT.**

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help: Search and Comments sections in “How TikTok recommends content.”

# DISCOVERY, DIVERSITY & RECENCY

|                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>EXPLORATION</b><br>TikTok deliberately introduces unfamiliar creators and topics so feeds do not only reinforce established interests. | <b>REPETITION CONTROLS</b><br>TikTok typically avoids recommending content already seen. In Friends and Following, it generally avoids showing two posts from the same creator consecutively. |
| <b>RECENCY</b><br>Initial feeds can include recent popular content; freshness and current interest help recommendation remain responsive. | <b>LOCAL RELEVANCE</b><br>Location and language can influence what is initially or contextually relevant.                                                                                     |
| <b>NOT ONLY TRENDS</b><br>Trends can create an audience cluster, but they do not replace the need for viewer interest and watch behavior. | <b>PREDICTION + EXPLORATION</b><br>The system must exploit known interests while still testing new content that might expand them.                                                            |
| <b>TIKTOK GROWS BY PREDICTING INTEREST - AND BY TESTING SURPRISES.</b>                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                               |

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help: recommendation diversity and sign-up/cold-start behavior.

# RECOMMENDATION ELIGIBILITY

A TikTok post can exist on the platform and still be excluded from the For You feed.

|                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>POST-LEVEL INELIGIBILITY</b></p> <p>TikTok can mark individual content as unsuitable for For You recommendation. Creators can review the reason in Analytics and appeal.</p> | <p><b>ACCOUNT-LEVEL IMPACT</b></p> <p>If an account repeatedly posts content unsuitable for For You, TikTok says the account and its posts may stop appearing in For You and become harder to find in Search.</p> |
| <p><b>RECOVERY</b></p> <p>TikTok may automatically restore an account to good standing depending on its content, and creators can appeal decisions.</p>                            | <p><b>CREATOR IMPLICATION</b></p> <p>Eligibility is not a minor compliance detail. It is a distribution prerequisite.</p>                                                                                         |
| <p><b>CONTENT CAN'T WIN REACH IF IT ISN'T ELIGIBLE FOR RECOMMENDATION.</b></p>                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

**SOURCE NOTE** TikTok Help: “Why is my account not being recommended?” and content violations / For You eligibility guidance.

# TIKTOK ALGORITHM PLAYBOOK

- 01 Stop the swipe. The opening must immediately signal relevance, curiosity or payoff.
- 02 Remove dead time. Every unnecessary beat creates another opportunity to skip.
- 03 Complete the promise. A hook that earns attention but fails to deliver can damage satisfaction and retention.
- 04 Make the topic semantically obvious through speech, on-screen text and captions so Search can understand it.
- 05 Use trends selectively. The right trend is one your intended audience already cares about.
- 06 Create for rewatchability when natural - dense, surprising or satisfying content can invite a second viewing.
- 07 Monitor eligibility and account health. Distribution hacks are irrelevant if content is excluded from recommendation.

## METRICS TO WATCH

Watch time • full watches • skips • shares • comments •  
Search traffic • follower vs For You traffic

## USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Keep the same payoff and test three first-two-second  
openings; compare skip behavior before changing the whole  
concept.

**ATTENTION OPENS THE DOOR. RETENTION KEEPS IT OPEN.**

# COMMUNITY IS THE ALGORITHM

## WHAT THE SYSTEM IS TRYING TO DO

Surface relevant conversations while combining machine-learning personalization with votes, community norms and human moderation.

## STRONG SIGNAL FAMILIES

Votes • comments • post age/type • communities • subscriptions • time spent • interaction history • explicit feedback

## WHERE ORGANIC GROWTH COMES FROM

Win the machine ranking and the community's cultural approval at the same time.

**REDDIT: UNDERSTAND THE SURFACE BEFORE OPTIMIZING THE POST.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit Help: Approach to Content Recommendations; sorting; Search; moderation; creator/post insights.

# INSIDE REDDIT'S HOME ALGORITHM

|                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CANDIDATE GENERATION</b><br>Create an initial list of posts the redditor may enjoy.                    | <b>FILTERING</b><br>Remove spam, already-seen content, blocked content and other unsuitable items.                 |
| <b>PREDICTION</b><br>Use predictive models to estimate what the individual redditor may or may not like.  | <b>RANKING</b><br>Sort candidates according to those predictions.                                                  |
| <b>DIVERSITY</b><br>Avoid too many similar posts in a row so the feed reflects a broader range of Reddit. | <b>DYNAMIC WEIGHTS</b><br>Reddit says the importance of factors can change with activity, engagement and feedback. |

Home recommendations improve the personalized “Best” sort. Logged-out users default to Popular, which is a different experience.

**REDDIT PERSONALIZES THE FEED, BUT COMMUNITY CONTEXT STILL SHAPES THE CANDIDATE.**

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit Help, “Reddit’s Approach to Content Recommendations,” updated 2026; Home feed recommendations.

# WHAT REDDIT MEASURES

|                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>POST SIGNALS</b></p> <p>Upvotes/downvotes • comments • post age • post type • flair • community</p>                    | <p><b>COMMUNITY SIGNALS</b></p> <p>Subscriptions • communities visited • time spent in communities • willingness to explore new communities</p> |
| <p><b>PERSONAL HISTORY</b></p> <p>Previous votes • previous comments • topics selected at onboarding • past interactions</p> | <p><b>FEEDBACK</b></p> <p>Show fewer / muting / blocks and other controls can reshape recommendations.</p>                                      |
| <p><b>ACCOUNT/CONTEXT</b></p> <p>Account age and location settings can contribute to personalization.</p>                    | <p><b>CREATOR ANALYTICS</b></p> <p>Reddit now exposes post insights including upvotes, comments, views, shares, reposts and awards.</p>         |
| <p><b>THE AUDIENCE DOES NOT JUST REACT TO RANKING. IT HELPS CREATE IT.</b></p>                                               |                                                                                                                                                 |

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit Help: Approach to Content Recommendations; Post & Comment Insights, updated Jun 2026.

# BEST, HOT, TOP, NEW, RISING & POPULAR

|                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BEST</b><br>Personalized Home ranking. Machine-learning recommendations can appear alongside subscribed-community content. | <b>HOT</b><br>Prioritizes posts receiving recent upvotes, comments and momentum. Community pages default to Hot unless changed. |
| <b>TOP</b><br>Prioritizes posts with the strongest overall upvotes/comments and can be filtered by time.                      | <b>NEW / LATEST</b><br>Prioritizes recency regardless of current vote/comment totals.                                           |
| <b>RISING</b><br>Prioritizes posts with recent view momentum; useful for spotting content gaining attention.                  | <b>POPULAR</b><br>A broader feed of popular recent Reddit content; logged-out users default here.                               |

A creator cannot talk about “the Reddit algorithm” without naming the sort. A post that is invisible in Hot can still be easy to find in New, and a personalized Best feed behaves differently again.

ON REDDIT, SORTING IS STRATEGY.

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit Help: “Reddit’s Approach to Content Recommendations”; “What filters and sorts are available?” updated Mar 2026.

# SEARCH, COMMENTS & COMMUNITY

|                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>SEARCH RELEVANCE</b></p> <p>Reddit Search can weigh relative word rarity, post age, votes and comments. Users can sort results differently, changing what rises.</p> | <p><b>SEARCH SCOPE</b></p> <p>Users can search posts, communities, comments, media and people, and can restrict searches to a community.</p>                                        |
| <p><b>COMMENT RANKING</b></p> <p>Comments can be sorted separately; moderators can also choose suggested comment sorting for a community.</p>                              | <p><b>HUMAN MODERATION</b></p> <p>Subreddit moderators create and enforce community-specific rules. A technically eligible post can still be removed for violating local norms.</p> |
| <p><b>COMMUNITY FIT</b></p> <p>Reddit itself recommends choosing the best community and following its rules to improve the chance that a post is noticed.</p>              | <p><b>AI SEARCH</b></p> <p>By 2026, Reddit's AI Search had become another discovery layer, synthesizing relevant posts and comments with inline citations.</p>                      |
| <p><b>ON REDDIT, YOU MUST SATISFY THE MACHINE AND THE COMMUNITY.</b></p>                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                     |

**SOURCE NOTE** Reddit Help: Search, filters/sorts, content moderation, and “What can I do to get my posts noticed?”

## 06 - REDDIT

# REDDIT ALGORITHM PLAYBOOK

- 01** Choose the community before writing the post. Relevance begins with subreddit fit.
- 02** Read the rules and recent top posts. Community formatting and cultural norms matter as much as ranking mechanics.
- 03** Write the title for the subreddit, not for generic social-media clickbait.
- 04** Create discussion. A useful comment thread increases the value of the post and can create continued attention.
- 05** Understand the sort. New, Hot, Best, Top and Rising create different opportunities and time windows.
- 06** Participate before promoting. Accounts that appear only when they want traffic rarely build community trust.
- 07** Use post insights to evaluate views, shares, comments and reposts - not only the visible vote score.

### METRICS TO WATCH

Views • upvotes • comments • shares • reposts • views-per-hour

### USEFUL EXPERIMENT

Compare the same topic framed for two genuinely relevant subreddits; measure discussion quality, not just score.

**DO NOT MARKET AT REDDIT. PARTICIPATE IN REDDIT.**

CROSS-PLATFORM

# THE CROSS-PLATFORM ALGORITHM MATRIX

|                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>LINKEDIN</b></p> <p>Best for: expertise &amp; professional context<br/>Key friction: low-value engagement tactics<br/>Discovery: suggested professional content</p> | <p><b>INSTAGRAM</b></p> <p>Best for: visual discovery &amp; sharing<br/>Key friction: weak retention / unoriginal content<br/>Discovery: Reels + Explore</p>               |
| <p><b>FACEBOOK</b></p> <p>Best for: connection + broad recommendation<br/>Key friction: spam / copied material<br/>Discovery: Feed + Reels</p>                            | <p><b>YOUTUBE</b></p> <p>Best for: deep viewing &amp; search intent<br/>Key friction: weak click-to-satisfaction chain<br/>Discovery: Home + Up Next + Search + Shorts</p> |
| <p><b>TIKTOK</b></p> <p>Best for: fast interest-based discovery<br/>Key friction: skips / eligibility<br/>Discovery: For You + Search</p>                                 | <p><b>REDDIT</b></p> <p>Best for: community discussion<br/>Key friction: poor subreddit fit<br/>Discovery: Best/Hot/Search/Popular</p>                                     |

Across all six platforms, the systems are converging on richer content understanding, stronger personalization and more explicit quality/eligibility controls.

DIFFERENT MECHANICS. SIMILAR HUMAN PROBLEM: EARN ATTENTION AND JUSTIFY IT.

HOW TO BEAT THE ALGORITHMS

SUSTAINABLE ADVANTAGES

You do not beat an algorithm by tricking it. You improve your odds by generating stronger relevance and satisfaction signals from the right audience.

|                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>1. AUDIENCE CLARITY</b></p> <p>Create for a specific person with a specific reason to care.</p>                                          | <p><b>2. STRONG OPENING</b></p> <p>Earn the click, stop, view or first seconds without misleading the audience.</p>                           |
| <p><b>3. DELIVERY</b></p> <p>Pay off the promise quickly enough that attention does not collapse.</p>                                          | <p><b>4. SEMANTIC CLARITY</b></p> <p>Make the topic obvious to both people and content-understanding systems.</p>                             |
| <p><b>5. ORIGINAL VALUE</b></p> <p>Add information, perspective, entertainment or transformation that is difficult to replace.</p>             | <p><b>6. NATURAL ACTIONS</b></p> <p>Design content worth saving, sending, discussing or continuing from - without begging for engagement.</p> |
| <p><b>7. ELIGIBILITY</b></p> <p>Protect account and recommendation status. Distribution starts with being allowed into the candidate pool.</p> | <p><b>8. FEEDBACK LOOPS</b></p> <p>Use analytics to learn which audience/content combinations produce repeatable satisfaction.</p>            |

THE BEST “HACK” IS STRONGER AUDIENCE-CONTENT FIT.

# WHAT DOES NOT WORK

**MORE HASHTAGS = MORE REACH**

False as a universal rule. Relevance matters more; Facebook can restrict accounts using excessive, distracting hashtags.

**FOLLOWERS GUARANTEE REACH**

Discovery surfaces routinely show content beyond follower networks, and followers may not see every post.

**WATCH TIME IS EVERYTHING**

Watch behavior matters, but satisfaction, relevance, negative feedback and context also shape recommendation.

**THERE IS A PERMANENT SECRET POSTING TIME**

Timing can affect initial audience availability, but no cross-platform universal time guarantees ranking.

**POST EVERY DAY OR DISAPPEAR**

No universal rule. YouTube explicitly rejects a minimum Shorts cadence; sustainable quality matters.

**COMMENTS ALWAYS EQUAL QUALITY**

Platforms increasingly distinguish meaningful conversation from bait, pods, automation and spam.

**ONE VIRAL POST UNLOCKS THE ACCOUNT**

Recommendation remains dynamic. Viral viewers may never return; each new item still competes for attention.

**THE ALGORITHM CAN BE PERMANENTLY HACKED**

Systems constantly retrain, experiment and change. Manipulation patterns become targets for suppression.

**TACTICS EXPIRE. HUMAN BEHAVIOR DOES NOT.**

# THE SIX-QUESTION PRE-PUBLISH SYSTEM

|                                                                                             |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>WHO?</b><br><b>1</b><br>Who exactly should receive this?                                 | <b>WHY STOP?</b><br><b>2</b><br>Why would they pause, click or choose to view?                                              | <b>WHY STAY?</b><br><b>3</b><br>What keeps the next second, paragraph or slide valuable?                                   |
| <b>WHAT VALUE?</b><br><b>4</b><br>What does the audience gain for the attention they spend? | <b>WHAT ACTION?</b><br><b>5</b><br>What natural behavior could the content inspire: save, share, comment, follow, continue? | <b>WHAT NEXT?</b><br><b>6</b><br>What should they reasonably want after this: another video, post, search or conversation? |

This framework works because it starts with the behavior recommendation systems are trying to predict instead of reverse-engineering hidden weights.

**DESIGN FOR PEOPLE. LET THE ALGORITHM OBSERVE THE RESULT.**

FUTURE OUTLOOK

# ALGORITHMS ENTER THE GENERATIVE ERA

Recommendation systems are moving beyond simple engagement scoring toward richer models that understand meaning, sequence and context.

|                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>SEMANTIC UNDERSTANDING</b></p> <p>Text, images, audio and video are increasingly interpreted together rather than as isolated metadata.</p>                      | <p><b>LONG HISTORIES</b></p> <p>LinkedIn’s 2026 GR processes more than 1,000 interactions as a sequence; other platforms also model longer behavior patterns.</p>            |
| <p><b>GENERATIVE RECOMMENDERS</b></p> <p>Recommendation models are adopting transformer/LLM techniques that can represent users and content in more flexible ways.</p> | <p><b>REAL-TIME PERSONALIZATION</b></p> <p>Large systems increasingly update preferences quickly as interests change.</p>                                                    |
| <p><b>AI-POWERED SEARCH</b></p> <p>Reddit’s 2026 AI Search synthesizes cited discussions; other platforms continue blending search and recommendation.</p>             | <p><b>MORE CONTROLS</b></p> <p>As personalization becomes more powerful, platforms are also adding recommendation resets, interest controls and explicit feedback tools.</p> |

THE NEXT GENERATION OF ALGORITHMS WILL RELY ON  
CONTEXT, NOT JUST CLICKS.

## CONCLUSION

# STOP CHASING ALGORITHMS

### Algorithms will change.

Ranking signals will change. Formats will change. Models will change. Platforms will change.

Trying to exploit every update is therefore a losing strategy. The more durable advantage is understanding what recommendation systems are fundamentally trying to accomplish: connect each person with content they are likely to value.

The strongest creators do not force an algorithm to distribute weak content. They create strong enough audience signals that the system has a reason to keep distributing it.

#### THE DURABLE STRATEGY

Know the audience • make the topic clear • earn attention  
• deliver the promise • create satisfaction • learn from  
feedback

#### THE ETHICAL STRATEGY

Avoid fake engagement, spam networks, copied content  
and manipulative tactics that platforms are explicitly  
working to reduce.

**DON'T BEAT THE ALGORITHM. GIVE IT A REASON TO  
CHOOSE YOU.**

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